When it comes to safeguarding SAP ERP applications, Swarovski, the world’s leading manufacturer of cut crystals, opts for Oracle Data Guard. By so doing the company is increasing its SAP DBMS availability and is also in a position to respond quickly to potential faults. In this interview, Swarovski’s IT IS Data Center Manager Harald Neuner tells us more about the implementation of Oracle Data Guard.

Was there a particular reason why Swarovski decided to address the issue of stability and DBMS high availability?

Neuner: Any company that uses SAP needs to look at the issue of stability. At the end of the day, non-availability of an ERP system puts business continuity at risk. Initially we implemented binary mirroring of our Oracle database with disk subsystems. But when a fault actually arose we realized that this measure wasn’t enough. It didn’t offer adequate protection. This was the main reason why we opted to switch from mirroring to a standby database concept.

What does ‘protection’ or a protection mechanism mean to you?

Neuner: We realized that physically backing up a binary DBMS mirror wasn’t enough for our needs. The sticking point was the existence of logical errors. Almost every business that uses SAP utilizes the scope for expansion—with the powerful SAP development tools. This involves the latent risk of data being deleted or accidentally changed through human error. With Oracle Data Guard we can employ an effective protection mechanism, because all transactions in the primary database are automatically and correctly transferred to the standby database after a delay of 4 hours. This time delay is a compromise between the logs created within a defined time and their integration into a secondary system, and the physical conversion process.

Why did you opt for Oracle Data Guard?

Neuner: We had, and we continue to have, a very good experience of the Oracle database in the SAP environment. So Oracle Data Guard was simply the logical choice.

How did you go about implementing Oracle Data Guard?

Neuner: The team at the Oracle for SAP Technology Center in Walldorf (Germany) helped us with the implementation of Oracle Data Guard. Together we defined a project schedule and then implemented the core tasks one step at a time. The key to it all was the configuration of Oracle Data Guard. Everything worked extremely well. We’ve always found that drawing on the expertise of Oracle specialists is well worth it. Above all, it enabled us to build up valuable database expertise in-house. We are now in a position to install Data Guard ourselves.

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– HARALD NEUNER
IT IS Data Center Manager at Swarovski
Were there any noteworthy incidents during the implementation phase?

Neuner: Everything worked very well indeed.

What is your experience of Oracle Data Guard in practice? What benefits has it brought?

Neuner: Oracle Data Guard increased the SAP DBMS high availability. The functionality of Data Guard gives us security and also the peace of mind of knowing that if a fault arises, we can carry on working with SAP within a defined period of time. With Oracle Data Guard we can switch easily to other DB servers and know that it works. We also carry out annual practice drills for the worst-case scenario. And, knock on wood, we’ve never had occasion to actually switch to a different host.

Do you have any further plans in terms of Oracle Data Guard?

Neuner: After the positive experience we’ve had with Oracle Data Guard, which we’re using for our ERP systems, we’re endeavoring to support more SAP systems with this solution. We are also about to take a decision as to the next stage in system stability, and Oracle RAC is the front runner.